

THE PARISH COMMUNITY – A GATHERING OF THE BAPTIZED

*(Part I of a pastoral reflection on parishes in the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Manitoba
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*To the Reverend Clergy, Religious Sisters, and Laity
of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Manitoba:*

Dearly Beloved in Christ!

Introduction to the Proper Criteria for Parish Evaluation

The life and vitality of our Ukrainian Catholic Church can be appreciated in various ways. The most common way is to look at the parish communities that form the backbone of our Church. A church building, packed with parishioners of all ages, singing together the Sunday Divine Liturgy evokes an image of a successful parish. But the question arises, is this the true picture of a viable parish? What are the proper criteria needed to evaluate a parish? Can a parish be evaluated today the same way it was 50 years ago?

The purpose of this pastoral reflection on parishes in the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Manitoba is to assist the laity, religious and clergy to understand better what we should expect from our parish communities, and what we can do from our part to make our parishes strong in the Spirit of the Lord.

1) Baptism and the Initiation into Parish Life

*No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.
[Jn. 3:5]*

An infant, held in its mother's arms after receiving the Sacramental Mystery of Baptism, invokes thoughts of human comfort, divine peace and concern for the future life of the child. What does baptism bring to the life of the child? What does this newly baptized infant mean to the life of the parish church to which he/she now belongs?

Through baptism the child is united to Christ and becomes an integral part of the People of God. Not only does the child receive the possibility of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, but also he/she can eventually help others to find this same hope for salvation. To be united to Christ is to live and work with Christ. The baptized in turn strive to teach others as Christ the Prophet taught, to make others holy as Christ the High Priest made others holy, to watch over the material needs of others as Christ the Good Shepherd cared for his flock. Each of the baptized through their individual talents and concerns are called by God to carry out his/her mission in a particular way on this earth. As part of the People of God, the individual baptized come together in a

particular community of believers, to carry out the mission together, in the name of Jesus, who always remains in their midst.

2) The Relation of the Parish to the Entire Church

I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. [Jn. 15:5]

With these words Jesus prepared his followers for their earthly Christian lives organized in distinct entities or branches, yet all united to the one life-giving vine which is Jesus Christ. For us this means the structure of parishes, united in the Archeparchy of Winnipeg, united in a Particular Ukrainian Catholic Church, united with the Universal Catholic Church.

From the time of the arrival of our first Ukrainian settlers to Canada in 1891 our pioneer immigrants sought to live out their Christian lives, and their commitment to their baptismal vows in Jesus Christ by establishing themselves in parish communities. These parishes were shepherded by their bishop through the assistance of his co-workers the priests. Although initially very difficult, ties were also maintained with the chief shepherds of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, and strengthened by their pastoral visits, such as the visits of Metropolitan Andrew Sheptycky to Canada in 1910 and 1921. Even the universal shepherd of the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II, made several pastoral visits to this portion of the People of God, including the visit to our Winnipeg Cathedral in 1984.

3) All Parishioners carry on the Evangelization of Jesus Christ

*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.
[1 Pet. 2:9]*

Through an organized parish community our Ukrainian Catholic faithful from the earliest of times have been able to live out their baptismal vows to follow Christ for the salvation of their souls and the souls of their family, friends, neighbours and strangers. By the faithful we include the laity, religious and clergy. They help spread the good news, in other words they “evangelize”, by participating in the three-fold ministry of Jesus Christ.

3.1) Evangelizing with the Teaching Ministry of Jesus

Through the parish community the teaching of Jesus Christ is carried out. This is done by the homily during the Divine Liturgy and at other services. This is also done by catechetical instruction for children, youth and adults. Such catechetical instruction includes baptismal and marriage programs, Lenten mission, workshops, church bulletins, brochures, films, websites, and the like. Catholic publications and religious education resource centers provide needed material help. This teaching ministry of Jesus Christ is available to clergy, religious sisters and laity to carry out.

3.2) Evangelizing with the Sanctifying Ministry of Jesus

Through the parish community the sanctification of all people and all things by Jesus Christ is carried out. Baptism and Chrismation, Penance and Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony and Ordination to Holy Orders, the Divine Liturgy and funeral rites generally take place in the parish church building as an act of worship involving the gathering of believers. Even though the sacramental mysteries are celebrated primarily by the parish priest in the name of Jesus, this also involves the religious and the laity. They, by their participation with responses, readings, assistance with ritual actions, and most importantly unity of prayer, enhance the ability of the sacramental mysteries to make all the participants recipients of God's grace. All the faithful are called to live holy lives by being an example to others in their charitable actions, virtuous speech, good intentions and living faith. God alone is holy, but his holiness is shared with all who are open to receive this gift from God.

3.3) Evangelizing with the Governing Ministry of Jesus

Through the parish community the governance of Jesus Christ is carried out through actions to assist the material needs of others. Whether it be in far off countries or just outside the very doors of our churches, there are people in need of food and clothing, shelter and medical care. There are people in need of social justice, basic human rights, freedom of speech and of religion. In a special way we know of the material needs of our brothers and sisters in Ukraine. But we are not limited only to their needs. In the Gospel according to St. Matthew [25:31-46] Jesus reminds us that by helping with the material needs of strangers, we are serving the very same Lord Jesus as well.

The governing ministry of Jesus also applies to the care of the parish community, its church building and properties. Just as the Good Shepherd protects the flock and provides it a place for shelter and safety [Jn. 10:1-18], so too the pastor, parish pastoral council, parish finance council and parish community as a whole have the responsibility to provide for needed parish facilities, which assist the parishioners in carrying out their Christian mission.

4) The Growth of the Church in Canada

*The hand of the Lord was with them
and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. [Acts 11:21]*

As the number of Ukrainian Catholic faithful increased in Canada over the years numerous parishes were established both in urban centers and in rural areas. The number of parishes was especially due to the large geographic area of settlement and the limited means of travel available.

In the Catholic Church a parish is always under the pastoral care of a bishop-shepherd. Before the arrival of Bishop Budka, our first Ukrainian Catholic bishop in Canada, parishes were established often under the auspices of the Basilian and Redemptorist missionaries, but always with the goal of oversight by a Ukrainian Catholic bishop. With the establishment of the Ukrainian Catholic Episcopal Corporation in 1913 parishes could finally be established under the authority of the

bishop appointed by the Catholic Church and recognized as legal entities by the Canadian government

The primary goal of the local parish community is united to the mission of the Catholic Church in the world. The parish church buildings and properties are never an end in themselves, but are there to help the parish community in living out its baptismal life. The establishment of a parish community included the parish church building, and often a church hall, cemetery, and parish residence. All these buildings and properties were meant to serve the parish community and its goals. Often with time new and larger buildings had to be built, or new locations chosen. At other times parish communities have been closed and church buildings and properties sold. Certainly the parish community did not worship the parish church; rather the parish church helped the parish community worship.

Conclusion

For over 100 years the Ukrainian Catholic Church has grown and prospered across Canada. From scattered settlements of poor immigrants in a Canada that was not always welcoming, the Ukrainian Catholic Church has developed into a Church [ecclesiastical] province with 4 eparchies and an archeparchy. Parish communities have been established from Atlantic Canada to Vancouver Island. Beautiful church buildings are found in urban centers and rural prairies. And most importantly the Ukrainian Catholic faithful have continued to live out their baptismal vows, participating in the evangelization of Canada through the teaching, sanctification and governing ministry of Jesus Christ.

Beginning with the newly baptized child held in its mother's arms, all the baptized are called upon to undertake the journey through this life, as children of God, walking hand in hand with Jesus our Saviour. In this the parish community carries out its role as the branch on the vine channeling God's grace to every individual in search of divine peace and eternal love in the Kingdom of God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

A - Teaching Ministry of Jesus

- i – List the ways that Evangelization through the Teaching Ministry of Jesus is carried out in your parish.
- ii - Has the Teaching Ministry increased or declined over the years?
- iii- How could it grow during the next 5 years?
- iv - How can you personally participate in this Teaching Ministry?

B - Sanctification Ministry of Jesus

v – One way to evaluate Evangelization through the Sanctification Ministry of Jesus in your parish is to review the parish statistics. How many Baptisms & Chrismations, First Solemn Holy Communions, Marriages, Ordinations, and funerals have taken place in your parish during the last 5 years?

vi - How often was the Divine Liturgy celebrated this past year?

vii -How often have you personally made use of these means of sanctification this past year?

viii - How can the parishioners continue to grow in holiness during the next year?

C - Governing Ministry of Jesus

ix – To evaluate Evangelization through the Governing Ministry of Jesus in your parish list the ways your parish community (including church organizations) have helped others this past year.

x - What was the average yearly financial contribution made by parishioners to your parish this past year?

xi - How many parishioners in total have served on parish council during the past 5 years?

xii - What steps can be taken to assist with the material needs of your parish community?

xiii - What steps can be taken to assist with the material needs of others beyond your parish community?